

AGNOSTICISM.

A REPLY TO PROFESSOR HUXLEY.

I.

It would hardly be reasonable to complain of Professor Huxley's delay in replying to the Paper on 'Agnosticism' which I read five months ago, when, at the urgent request of an old friend, I reluctantly consented to address the Church Congress at Manchester. I am obliged to him for doing it the honour to bring it to the notice of a wider circle than that to which it was directly addressed; and I fear that, for reasons which have been the occasion of universal regret, he may not have been equal to literary effort. But, at the same time, it is impossible not to notice that a writer is at a great advantage in attacking a fugitive essay a quarter of a year after it was made public. Such a lapse of time ought, indeed, to enable him to apprehend distinctly the argument with which he is dealing; and it might, at least, secure him from any such inaccuracy in quotation as greater haste might excuse. But if either his idiosyncrasy, or his sense of assured superiority, should lead him to pay no real attention to the argument he is attacking, or should betray him into material misquotation, he may at least be sure that scarcely any of his readers will care to refer to the original paper, or will have the opportunity of doing so. I can scarcely hope that Professor Huxley's obliging reference to the *Official Report of the Church Congress* will induce many of those who are influenced by his answer to my Paper to purchase that interesting volume, though they would be well-repaid by some of its other contents; and I can hardly rely on their spending even twopence upon the reprint of the Paper, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. I have therefore felt obliged to ask the editor of this Review to be kind enough to admit to his pages a brief re-statement of the position which Professor Huxley has assailed, with such notice of his arguments as is practicable within the comparatively brief space which can be afforded me. I could not, indeed, amidst the pressing claims of a College like this in term time, besides the chairmanship of a Hospital, a Preachership, and other duties, attempt any reply which would deal as thoroughly as could be wished with an article of so much skill and finish. But it

is a matter of justice to my cause and to myself to remove at once the unscientific and prejudiced representation of the case which Professor Huxley has put forward; and fortunately there will be need of no elaborate argument for this purpose. There is no occasion to go beyond Professor Huxley's own Article and the language of my Paper to exhibit his entire misapprehension of the point in dispute; while I am much more than content to rely for the invalidation of his own contentions upon the authorities he himself quotes.

What, then, is the position with which Professor Huxley finds fault? He is good enough to say that what he calls my 'description' of an Agnostic may for the present pass, so that we are so far, at starting, on common ground. The actual description of an Agnostic, which is given in my paper, is indeed distinct from the words he quotes, and is taken from an authoritative source. But what I have said is that, as an escape from such an article of Christian belief as that We have a Father in Heaven, or that Jesus Christ is the Judge of quick and dead, and will hereafter return to judge the world, an Agnostic urges that 'he has no means of a scientific knowledge of the unseen world or of the future;' and I maintain that this plea is irrelevant. Christians do not presume to say that they have a scientific knowledge of such articles of their creed. They say that they believe them, and they believe them mainly on the assurances of Jesus Christ. Consequently their characteristic difference from an Agnostic consists in the fact that they believe those assurances, and that he does not. Professor Huxley's observation, 'are there then any Christians who say that they know nothing about the unseen world and the future? I was ignorant of the fact, but I am ready to accept it on the authority of a professed theologian,' is either a quibble, or one of many indications that he does not recognise the point at issue. I am speaking, as the sentence shows, of scientific knowledge—knowledge which can be obtained by our own reason and observation alone—and no one with Professor Huxley's learning is justified in being ignorant that it is not upon such knowledge, but upon supernatural revelation, that Christian belief rests. However, as he goes on to say, my view of 'the real state of the case is that the Agnostic "does not believe the authority" on which "these things" are stated, which authority is Jesus Christ. He is simply an old-fashioned "infidel" who is afraid to own to his right name.' The argument has nothing to do with his motive, whether it is being afraid or not. It only concerns the fact that that by which he is distinctively separated from the Christian is that he does not believe the assurances of Jesus Christ.

Professor Huxley thinks there is 'an attractive simplicity about this solution of the problem'—he means, of course, this statement of the case—'and it has that advantage of being somewhat offensive to the persons attacked, which is so dear to the less refined sort of

controversialist.' I think Professor Huxley must have forgotten himself and his own feelings in this observation. There can be no question, of course, of his belonging himself to the more refined sort of controversialists; but he has a characteristic fancy for solutions of problems, or statements of cases, which have the 'advantage of being somewhat offensive to the persons attacked.' Without taking this particular phrase into account, it certainly has 'the advantage of being offensive to the persons attacked' that Professor Huxley should speak in this article of 'the pestilent doctrine on which all the churches have insisted, that honest disbelief'—the word 'honest' is not a misquotation—"honest disbelief in their more or less astonishing creeds is a moral offence, indeed a sin of the deepest dye, deserving and involving the same future retribution as murder or robbery," or that he should say, 'Trip in morals or in doctrine (especially in doctrine), without due repentance or retractation, or fail to get properly baptized before you die, and a *plébiscite* of the Christians of Europe, if they were true to their creeds, would affirm your everlasting damnation by an immense majority.' We have fortunately nothing to do in this argument with *plébiscites*; and as statements of authoritative Christian teaching, the least that can be said of these allegations is that they are offensive exaggerations. It had 'the advantage' again, of being 'offensive to the persons attacked,' when Professor Huxley, in an article in this Review on 'Science and the Bishops,' in November 1887, said that 'Scientific ethics can and does declare that the profession of belief' in such narratives as that of the devils entering a herd of swine, or of the fig tree that was blasted for bearing no figs, upon the evidence on which multitudes of Christians believe it, 'is immoral;' and the observation which followed, that 'theological apologists would do well to consider the fact that, in the matter of intellectual veracity, science is already a long way ahead of the churches,' has the same 'advantage.' I repeat that I cannot but treat Professor Huxley as an example of the more refined sort of controversialist; it must be supposed, therefore, that when he speaks of observations or insinuations which are somewhat offensive to the 'persons attacked' being dear to the other sort of controversialists, he is unconscious of his own methods of controversy—or, shall I say, his own temptations?

But I desire as far as possible to avoid any rivalry with Professor Huxley in these refinements—more or less—of controversy; and am, in fact, forced by pressure both of space and of time to keep as rigidly as possible to the points directly at issue. He proceeds to restate the case as follows:—"The Agnostic says, "I cannot find good evidence that so and so is true." "Ah," says his adversary, seizing his opportunity, "then you declare that Jesus Christ was untruthful, for he said so and so"—a very telling method of rousing prejudice.' Now that superior scientific veracity to which, as we have seen, Pro-

fessor Huxley lays claim, should have prevented him putting such vulgar words into my mouth. There is not a word in my paper to charge Agnostics with declaring that Jesus Christ was 'untruthful.' I believe it impossible in these days for any man who claims attention—I might say, for any man—to declare our Lord untruthful. What I said, and what I repeat, is that the position of an Agnostic involves the conclusion that Jesus Christ was under an 'illusion' in respect to the deepest beliefs of His life and teaching. The words of my paper are: 'An Agnosticism which knows nothing of the relation of man to God must not only refuse belief to our Lord's most undoubted teaching, but must deny the reality of the spiritual convictions in which He lived and died.' The point is this—that there can, at least, be no reasonable doubt that Jesus Christ lived, and taught, and died, in the belief of certain great principles respecting the existence of God, our relation to God, and His own relation to us, which an Agnostic says are beyond the possibilities of human knowledge; and of course an Agnostic regards Jesus Christ as a man. If so, he must necessarily regard Jesus Christ as mistaken, since the notion of His being untruthful is a supposition which I could not conceive being suggested. The question I have put is not, as Professor Huxley represents, what is the most unpleasant alternative to belief in the primary truths of the Christian religion, but what is the least unpleasant; and all I have maintained is that the least unpleasant alternative necessarily involved is, that Jesus Christ was under an illusion in His most vital convictions.

I content myself with thus rectifying the state of the case, without making the comments which I think would be justified on such a crude misrepresentation of my argument. But Professor Huxley goes on to observe that 'the value of the evidence as to what Jesus may have said and done, and as to the exact nature and scope of his authority, is just that which the Agnostic finds it most difficult to determine.' Undoubtedly, that is a primary question; but who would suppose from Professor Huxley's statement of the case that the argument of the paper he is attacking proceeded to deal with this very point, and that he has totally ignored the chief consideration it alleged? Almost immediately after the words Professor Huxley has quoted, the following passage occurs, which I must needs transfer to these pages, as containing the central point of the argument. 'It may be asked how far we can rely on the accounts we possess of our Lord's teaching on these subjects. Now it is unnecessary for the general argument before us to enter on those questions respecting the authenticity of the Gospel narratives, which ought to be regarded as settled by M. Renan's practical surrender of the adverse case. *Apart from all disputed points of criticism, no one practically doubts that our Lord lived, and that He died on the Cross, in the most intense sense of filial relation to His Father in Heaven, and that He bore*

testimony to that Father's providence, love, and grace towards mankind. The Lord's Prayer affords sufficient evidence upon these points. If the Sermon on the Mount alone be added, the whole unseen world, of which the Agnostic refuses to know anything, stands unveiled before us. There you see revealed the Divine Father and Creator of all things, in personal relation to His creatures, hearing their prayers, witnessing their actions, caring for them and rewarding them. There you hear of a future judgment administered by Christ Himself, and of a Heaven to be hereafter revealed, in which those who live as the children of that Father, and who suffer in the cause and for the sake of Christ Himself, will be abundantly rewarded. If Jesus Christ preached that Sermon, made those promises, and taught that prayer, then anyone who says that we know nothing of God, or of a future life, or of an unseen world, says that he does not believe Jesus Christ.'

Professor Huxley has not one word to say upon this argument, though the whole case is involved in it. Let us take as an example the illustration he proceeds to give. 'If,' he says, 'I venture to doubt that the Duke of Wellington gave the command, "Up, Guards, and at 'em!" at Waterloo, I do not think that even Dr. Wace would accuse me of disbelieving the Duke.' Certainly not. But if Professor Huxley were to maintain that the pursuit of glory was the true motive of the soldier, and that it was an illusion to suppose that simple devotion to duty could be the supreme guide of military life, I should certainly charge him with contradicting the Duke's teaching and disregarding his authority and example. A hundred stories like that of 'Up, Guards, and at 'em!' might be doubted, or positively disproved, and it would still remain a fact beyond all reasonable doubt that the Duke of Wellington was essentially characterised by the sternest and most devoted sense of duty, and that he had inculcated duty as the very watchword of a soldier; and even Professor Huxley would not suggest that Lord Tennyson's ode, which has embodied this characteristic in immortal verse, was an unfounded poetical romance.

The main question at issue, in a word, is one which Professor Huxley has chosen to leave entirely on one side—whether, namely, allowing for the utmost uncertainty on other points of the criticism to which he appeals, there is any reasonable doubt that the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount afford a true account of our Lord's essential belief and cardinal teaching. If they do—then I am not now contending that they involve the whole of the Christian Creed; I am not arguing, as Professor Huxley would represent, that he ought for that reason alone to be a Christian—I simply represent that, as an Agnostic, he must regard those beliefs and that teaching as mistaken—the result of an illusion, to say the least. I am not going, therefore, to follow Professor Huxley's example, and go down a steep place with the Gadarene swine into a sea of uncertainties and

possibilities, and stake the whole case of Christian belief as against Agnosticism upon one of the most difficult and mysterious narratives in the New Testament. I will state my position on that question presently. But I am first and chiefly concerned to point out that Professor Huxley has skilfully evaded the very point and edge of the argument he had to meet. Let him raise what difficulties he pleases, with the help of his favourite critics, about the Gadarene swine, or even about all the stories of demoniacs. He will find that his critics—and even critics more rationalistic than they—fail him when it comes to the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount, and, I will add, the story of the Passion. He will find, or rather he must have found, that the very critics he relies upon recognise that in the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer, allowing for variations in form and order, the substance of our Lord's essential teaching is preserved. On a point which, until Professor Huxley shows cause to the contrary, can hardly want argument, the judgment of the most recent of his witnesses may suffice—Professor Reuss of Strasburg. In Professor Huxley's article on the 'Evolution of Theology' in the number of this Review for March 1886, he says: 'As Reuss appears to me to be one of the most learned, acute, and fair-minded of those whose works I have studied, I have made most use of the commentary and dissertations in his splendid French edition of the Bible.' What then is the opinion of the critic for whom Professor Huxley has this regard? In the volume of his work which treats of the first three Gospels, Reuss says at p. 191-2: 'If anywhere the tradition which has preserved to us the reminiscences of the life of Jesus upon earth carries with it certainty and the evidence of its fidelity, it is here;' and again: 'In short, it must be acknowledged that the redactor, in thus concentrating the substance of the moral teaching of the Lord, has rendered a real service to the religious study of this portion of the tradition, and the reserves which historical criticism has a right to make with respect to the form will in no way diminish this advantage.' It will be observed that Professor Reuss thinks, as many good critics have thought, that the Sermon on the Mount combines various distinct utterances of our Lord, but he none the less recognises that it embodies an unquestionable account of the substance of our Lord's teaching.

But it is surely superfluous to argue either this particular point, or the main conclusion which I have founded on it. Can there be any doubt whatever, in the mind of any reasonable man, that Jesus Christ had beliefs respecting God which an Agnostic alleges there is no sufficient ground for? We know something at all events of what His disciples taught; we have authentic original documents, unquestioned by any of Professor Huxley's authorities, as to what St. Paul taught and believed, and of what he taught and believed respecting his Master's teaching; and the central point of this teaching

is a direct assertion of knowledge and revelation as against the very Agnosticism from which Professor Huxley manufactured that designation. 'As I passed by,' said St. Paul at Athens, 'I found an altar with this inscription: "To the unknown God." Whom therefore ye ignorantly—or in Agnosticism—worship, Him declare I unto you.' An Agnostic withholds his assent from this primary article of the Christian creed; and though Professor Huxley, in spite of the lack of information he alleges respecting early Christian teaching, knows enough on the subject to have a firm belief 'that the Nazarenes, say of the year 40,' headed by James, would have stoned anyone who propounded the Nicene creed to them, he will hardly contend that they denied that article, or doubted that Jesus Christ believed it. Let us again listen to the authority to whom Professor Huxley himself refers. Reuss says at page 4 of the work already quoted:—

Historical literature in the primitive Church attaches itself in the most immediate manner to the reminiscences collected by the Apostles and their friends, directly after their separation from their Master. The need of such a return to the past arose naturally from the profound impression which had been made upon them by the teaching, and still more by the individuality itself of Jesus, and on which both their hopes for the future and their convictions were founded. . . . It is in these facts, in this continuity of a tradition which could not but go back to the very morrow of the tragic scene of Golgotha that we have a strong guarantee for its authenticity. . . . We have direct historical proof that the thread of tradition was not interrupted. Not only does one of our Evangelists furnish this proof in formal terms (Luke i. 2); but in many other places besides we perceive the idea, or the point of view, that all which the Apostles know, think, and teach, is at bottom and essentially a reminiscence—a reflection of what they have seen and learnt at another time, a reproduction of lessons and impressions received.

Now let it be allowed for argument's sake that the belief and teaching of the Apostles are distinct from those of subsequent Christianity, yet it is surely a mere paradox to maintain that they did not assert, as taught by their Master, truths which an Agnostic denies. They certainly spoke, as Paul did, of the Love of God; they certainly spoke, as Paul did, of Jesus having been raised from the dead by God the Father (Gal. i. 1); they certainly spoke, as Paul did, of Jesus Christ returning to judge the world; they certainly spoke, as Paul did, of 'The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (2 Cor. xi. 31). That they could have done this without Jesus Christ having taught God's love, or having said that God was His Father, or having declared that He would judge the world, is a supposition which will certainly be regarded by an overwhelming majority of reasonable men as a mere paradox; and I cannot conceive, until he says so, that Professor Huxley would maintain it. But if so, then all Professor Huxley's argumentation about the Gadarene swine is mere irrelevance to the argument he undertakes to answer. The Gospels might be obliterated as evidence to-morrow, and it would remain indisputable that Jesus Christ taught certain truths respecting God,

and man's relation to God, from which an Agnostic withholds his assent. If so, he does not believe Jesus Christ's teaching ; he is so far an unbeliever, and 'unbeliever,' Dr. Johnson says, is an equivalent of 'Infidel.'

This consideration will indicate another irrelevance in Professor Huxley's argument. He asks for a definition of what a Christian is, before he will allow that he can be justly called an infidel. But without being able to give an accurate definition of a crayfish, which perhaps only Professor Huxley could do, I may be very well able to say that some creatures are not crayfish ; and it is not necessary to frame a definition of a Christian in order to say confidently that a person who does not believe the broad and unquestionable elements of Christ's teachings and convictions is not a Christian. 'Infidel' or 'unbeliever' is of course, as Professor Huxley says, a relative and not a positive term. He makes a great deal of play out of what he seems to suppose will be a very painful and surprising consideration to myself, that to a Mahommedan I am an infidel. Of course I am ; and I should never expect a Mahommedan, if he were called upon, as I was, to argue before an assembly of his own fellow-believers, to call me anything else. Professor Huxley is good enough to imagine me in his company on a visit to the Hazar Mosque at Cairo. When he entered that mosque without due credentials, he suspects that, had he understood Arabic, 'dog of an infidel' would have been by no means the most 'unpleasant' of the epithets showered upon him, before he could explain and apologise for the mistake. If, he says, 'I had had the pleasure of Dr. Wace's company on that occasion, the indiscriminative followers of the Prophet would, I am afraid, have made no difference between us ; not even if they had known that he was the head of an orthodox Christian seminary.' Probably not ; and I will add that I should have felt very little confidence in any attempts which Professor Huxley might have made, in the style of his present Article, to protect me, by repudiating for himself the unpleasant epithets which he deprecates. It would, I suspect, have been of very little avail to attempt a subtle explanation, to one of the learned Mollahs of whom he speaks, that he really did not mean to deny that there was one God, but only that he did not know anything on the subject, and that he desired to avoid expressing any opinion respecting the claims of Mahomet. It would be plain to the learned Mollah that Professor Huxley did not believe either of the articles of the Mahommedan creed—in other words that, for all his fine distinctions, he was at bottom a downright infidel, such as I confessed myself, and that there was an end of the matter. There is no fair way of avoiding the plain matter of fact in either case. A Mahommedan believes and asserts that there is no God but God, and that Mahomet is the Prophet of God. I don't believe Mahomet. In the plain, blunt, sensible phrase people used to use on such subjects, I believe he was a false prophet, and I

am a downright infidel about him. The Christian creed might almost be summed up in the assertion that there is one, and but one God, and that Jesus Christ is His Prophet; and whoever denies that creed says that he does not believe Jesus Christ, by whom it was undoubtedly asserted. It is better to look facts in the face, especially from a scientific point of view. Whether Professor Huxley is justified in his denial of that creed is a further question, which demands separate consideration, but which was not, and is not now, at issue. All I say is that his position involves that disbelief or infidelity, and that this is a responsibility which must be faced by Agnosticism.

But I am forced to conclude that Professor Huxley cannot have taken the pains to understand the point I raised, not only by the irrelevance of his argument on these considerations, but by a misquotation which the superior accuracy of a man of science ought to have rendered impossible. Twice over in the article, he quotes me as saying that 'it is, and it ought to be, an unpleasant thing for a man to have to say plainly that he does not believe in Jesus Christ.' As he winds up his attack upon my paper by bringing against this statement his rather favourite charge of 'immorality'—and even 'most profound immorality'—he was the more bound to accuracy in his quotation of my words. But neither in the official report of the Congress to which he refers, nor in any report that I have seen, is this the statement attributed to me. What I said, and what I meant to say, was that it ought to be an unpleasant thing for a man to have to say plainly 'that he does not believe Jesus Christ.' By inserting the little word 'in,' Professor Huxley has, by an unconscious ingenuity, shifted the import of the statement. He goes on (p. 184) to denounce 'the pestilent doctrine on which all the Churches have insisted, that honest disbelief in their more or less astonishing creeds is a moral offence, indeed a sin of the deepest dye.' His interpretation exhibits, in fact, the idea in his own mind, which he has doubtless conveyed to his readers, that I said it ought to be unpleasant to a man to have to say that he does not believe in the Christian Creed. I certainly think it ought, for reasons I will mention; but that is not what I said. I spoke, deliberately, not of the Christian Creed as a whole, but of Jesus Christ as a person, and regarded as a witness to certain primary truths which an Agnostic will not acknowledge. It was a personal consideration to which I appealed, and not a dogmatic one; and I am sorry, for that reason, that Professor Huxley will not allow me to leave it in the reserve with which I hoped it had been sufficiently indicated. I said that 'no criticism worth mentioning doubts the story of the Passion; and that story involves the most solemn attestation, again and again, of truths of which an Agnostic coolly says he knows nothing. An Agnosticism which knows nothing of the relation of man to God must not only refuse belief to our Lord's

most undoubted teaching, but must deny the reality of the spiritual convictions in which He lived and died. It must declare that His most intimate, most intense beliefs, and His dying aspirations were an illusion. Is that supposition tolerable?' I do not think this deserves to be called 'a proposition of the most profoundly immoral character.' I think it ought to be unpleasant, and I am sure it always will be unpleasant, for a man to listen to the Saviour on the Cross uttering such words as 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,' and to say that they are not to be trusted as revealing a real relation between the Saviour and God. In spite of all doubts as to the accuracy of the Gospels, Jesus Christ—I trust I may be forgiven, under the stress of controversy, for mentioning His sacred Name in this too familiar manner—is a tender and sacred figure to all thoughtful minds, and it is, it ought to be, and it always will be, a very painful thing, to say that He lived and died under a mistake in respect to the words which were first and last on His lips. I think, as I have admitted, that it should be unpleasant for a man who has as much appreciation of Christianity, and of its work in the world, as Professor Huxley sometimes shows, to have to say that its belief was founded on no objective reality. The unpleasantness, however, of denying one system of thought may be balanced by the pleasantness, as Professor Huxley suggests, of asserting another and a better one. But nothing, to all time, can do away with the unpleasantness, not only of repudiating sympathy with the most sacred figure of humanity in His deepest beliefs and feelings, but of pronouncing Him under an illusion in His last agony. If it be the truth, let it by all means be said; but if we are to talk of 'immorality' in such matters, I think there must be a lack of moral sensibility in any man who could say it without pain.

The plain fact is that this misquotation would have been as impossible as a good deal else of Professor Huxley's argument, had he, in any degree, appreciated the real strength of the hold which Christianity has over men's hearts and minds. The strength of the Christian Church, in spite of its faults, errors, and omissions, is not in its creed, but in its Lord and Master. In spite of all the critics, the Gospels have conveyed to the minds of millions of men a living image of Christ. They see Him there; they hear His voice; they listen, and they believe Him. It is not so much that they accept certain doctrines as taught by Him, as that they accept Him, Himself, as their Lord and their God. The sacred fire of trust in Him descended upon the Apostles, and has from them been handed on from generation to generation. It is with that living personal figure that agnosticism has to deal; and as long as the Gospels practically produce the effect of making that figure a reality to human hearts, so long will the Christian Faith, and the Christian Church, in their main characteristics, be vital and permanent forces in the world. Professor

Huxley tells us, in a melancholy passage, that he cannot define 'the grand figure of Jesus.' Who shall dare to 'define' it? But saints have both written and lived an *imitatio Christi*, and men and women can feel and know what they cannot define. Professor Huxley, it would seem, would have us all wait coolly until we had solved all critical difficulties, before acting on such a belief. 'Because,' he says, 'we are often obliged, by the pressure of events, to act on very bad evidence, it does not follow that it is proper to act on such evidence when the pressure is absent.' Certainly not; but it is strange ignorance of human nature for Professor Huxley to imagine that there is no 'pressure' in this matter. It was a voice which understood the human heart better which said, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;' and the attraction of that voice outweighs many a critical difficulty under the pressure of the burdens and the sins of life.

Professor Huxley, indeed, admits, in one sentence of his article, the force of this influence on individuals.

If (he says) a man can find a friend, the hypostasis of all his hopes, the mirror of his ethical ideal, in the pages of any, or of all, of the Gospels, let him live by faith in that ideal. Who shall, or can, forbid him? But let him not delude himself with the notion that his faith is evidence of the objective reality of that in which he trusts. Such evidence is to be obtained only by the use of the methods of science, as applied to history and to literature, and it amounts at present to very little.

Well, a single man's belief in an ideal may be very little evidence of its objective reality. But the conviction of millions of men, generation after generation, of the veracity of the four evangelical witnesses, and of the human and Divine reality of the figure they describe, has at least something of the weight of the verdict of a jury. *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*. Practically the figure of Christ lives. The Gospels have created it; and it subsists as a personal fact in life, alike among believers and unbelievers. Professor Huxley, himself, in spite of all his scepticism, appears to have his own type of this character. The apologue of the woman taken in adultery might, he says, 'if internal evidence were an infallible guide, well be affirmed to be a typical example of the teachings of Jesus.' Internal evidence may not be an infallible guide; but it certainly carries great weight, and no one has relied more upon it in these questions than the critics whom Professor Huxley quotes.

But as I should be sorry to imitate Professor Huxley, on so momentous a subject, by evading the arguments and facts he alleges, I will consider the question of external evidence on which he dwells. I must repeat that the argument of my Paper is independent of this controversy. The fact that our Lord taught and believed what Agnostics ignore is not dependent on the criticism of the four Gospels. In addition to the general evidence to which I have alluded, there is a further consideration which Professor Huxley feels it

necessary to mention, but which he evades by an extraordinary inconsequence. He alleges that the story of the Gadarene swine involves fabulous matter, and that this discredits the trustworthiness of the whole Gospel record. But he says :—

At this point a very obvious objection arises and deserves full and candid consideration. It may be said that critical scepticism carried to the length suggested is historical pyrrhonism; that if we are to altogether discredit an ancient or a modern historian because he has assumed fabulous matter to be true, it will be as well to give up paying any attention to history. . . . Of course (he acknowledges) this is perfectly true. I am afraid there is no man alive whose witness could be accepted, if the condition precedent were proof that he had never invented and promulgated a myth.

The question, then, which Professor Huxley himself raises, and which he had to answer, was this: Why is the general evidence of the Gospels, on the main facts of our Lord's life and teaching, to be discredited, even if it be true that they have invented or promulgated a myth about the Gadarene swine? What is his answer to that simple and broad question? Strange to say, absolutely none at all! He leaves this vital question without any answer, and goes back to the Gadarene swine. The question he raises is whether the supposed incredibility of the story of the Gadarene swine involves the general untrustworthiness of the story of the Gospels; and his conclusion is that it involves the incredibility of the story of the Gadarene swine. A more complete evasion of his own question it would be difficult to imagine. As Professor Huxley almost challenges me to state what I think of that story, I have only to say that I fully believe it, and moreover that Professor Huxley, in this very article, has removed the only consideration which would have been a serious obstacle to my belief. If he were prepared to say, on his high scientific authority, that the narrative involves a contradiction of established scientific truth, I could not but defer to such a decision, and I might be driven to consider those possibilities of interpolation in the narrative, which Professor Huxley is good enough to suggest to all who feel the improbability of the story too much for them. But Professor Huxley expressly says :—

I admit I have no *à priori* objection to offer. . . . For anything I can absolutely prove to the contrary, there may be spiritual things capable of the same transmigration, with like effects So I declare, as plainly as I can, that I am unable to show cause why these transferable devils should not exist.

Very well, then, as the highest science of the day is unable to show cause against the possibility of the narrative, and as I regard the Gospels as containing the evidence of trustworthy persons who were contemporary with the events narrated, and as their general veracity carries to my mind the greatest possible weight, I accept their statement in this, as in other instances. Professor Huxley ventures 'to

doubt whether at this present moment any Protestant theologian, who has a reputation to lose, will say that he believes the Gadarene Story.' He will judge whether I fall under his description; but I repeat that I believe it, and that he has removed the only objection to my believing it.

However, to turn finally to the important fact of external evidence. Professor Huxley reiterates, again and again, that the verdict of scientific criticism is decisive against the supposition that we possess in the four Gospels the authentic and contemporary evidence of known writers. He repeats, 'without the slightest fear of refutation, that the four Gospels, as they have come to us, are the work of unknown writers.' In particular, he challenges my allegation of 'M. Renan's practical surrender of the adverse case;' and he adds the following observations, to which I beg the reader's particular attention:—

I thought (he says) I knew M. Renan's works pretty well, but I have contrived to miss this 'practical'—(I wish Dr. Wace had defined the scope of that useful adjective)—surrender. However, as Dr. Wace can find no difficulty in pointing out the passage of M. Renan's writings, by which he feels justified in making his statement, I shall wait for further enlightenment, contenting myself, for the present, with remarking that if M. Renan were to retract and do penance in Notre Dame to-morrow for any contributions to Biblical criticism that may be specially his property, the main results of that criticism, as they are set forth in the works of Strauss, Baur, Reuss, and Volkmar, for example, would not be sensibly affected.

Let me begin then by enlightening Professor Huxley about M. Renan's surrender. I have the less difficulty in doing so as the passages he has contrived to miss have been collected by me already in a little tract on the *Authenticity of The Gospels*,¹ and in some lectures on the *Gospel and its Witnesses*; ² and I shall take the liberty, for convenience' sake, of repeating some of the observations there made.

I beg first to refer to the preface to M. Renan's *Vie de Jésus*.³ There M. Renan says:—

As to Luke, doubt is scarcely possible. The Gospel of St. Luke is a regular composition, founded upon earlier documents. It is the work of an author who chooses, curtails, combines. The author of this Gospel is certainly the same as the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Now, the author of the Acts seems to be a companion of St. Paul—a character which accords completely with St. Luke. I know that more than one objection may be opposed to this reasoning; but one thing at all events is beyond doubt, namely, that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts is a man who belonged to the second apostolic generation; and this suffices for our purpose. The date of this Gospel, moreover, may be determined with sufficient precision by considerations drawn from the book itself. The twenty-first chapter of St. Luke, which is inseparable from the rest of the work, was certainly written after the siege of Jerusalem, but not long after. We are, therefore, here on solid ground, for we are dealing with a work proceeding entirely from the same hand, and possessing the most complete unity.

¹ Religious Tract Society.

² John Murray, 1883.

³ 15th edition, p. xlix.

It may be important to observe that this admission has been supported by M. Renan's further investigations, as expressed in his subsequent volume on *The Apostles*. In the Preface to that volume he discusses fully the nature and value of the narrative contained in the Acts of the Apostles, and he pronounces the following decided opinions as to the authorship of that book, and its connection with the Gospel of St. Luke (p. x sq.):—

One point which is beyond question is that the Acts are by the same author as the third Gospel, and are a continuation of that Gospel. One need not stop to prove this proposition, which has never been seriously contested. The prefaces at the commencement of each work, the dedication of each to Theophilus, the perfect resemblance of style and of ideas, furnish on this point abundant demonstrations.

A second proposition, which has not the same certainty, but which may, however, be regarded as extremely probable, is that the author of the Acts is a disciple of Paul, who accompanied him for a considerable part of his travels.

At a first glance, M. Renan observes, this proposition appears indubitable, from the fact that the author, on so many occasions, uses the pronoun 'we,' indicating that on those occasions he was one of the apostolic band by whom St. Paul was accompanied. 'One may even be astonished that a proposition apparently so evident should have found persons to contest it.' He notices, however, the difficulties which have been raised on the point, and then proceeds as follows (p. xiv):—

Must we be checked by these objections? I think not; and I persist in believing that the person who finally prepared the Acts is really the disciple of Paul, who says 'we' in the last chapters. All difficulties, however insoluble they may appear, ought to be, if not dismissed, at least held in suspense, by an argument so decisive as that which results from the use of this word 'we.'

He then observes that MSS. and tradition combine in assigning the third Gospel to a certain Luke, and that it is scarcely conceivable that a name in other respects obscure should have been attributed to so important a work for any other reason than that it was the name of the real author. Luke, he says, had no place in tradition, in legend, or in history, when these two treatises were ascribed to him. M. Renan concludes in the following words: 'We think, therefore, that the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts is in all reality Luke, the disciple of Paul.'

Now let the import of these expressions of opinion be duly weighed. Of course M. Renan's judgments are not to be regarded as affording in themselves any adequate basis for our acceptance of the authenticity of the chief books of the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles and the four Gospels bear on their face certain positive claims, on the faith of which they have been accepted in all ages of the Church; and they do not rest, in the first instance, on the authority of any modern critic. But though M. Renan would be a very unsatisfactory witness to rely upon for the purpose of

positive testimony to the Gospels, his estimates of the value of modern critical objections to those sacred books have all the weight of the admissions of a hostile witness. No one doubts his familiarity with the whole range of the criticism represented by such names as Strauss and Baur, and no one questions his disposition to give full weight to every objection which that criticism can urge. Even without assuming that he is prejudiced on either one side or the other, it will be admitted on all hands that he is more favourably disposed than otherwise to such criticism as Professor Huxley relies on. When, therefore, with this full knowledge of the literature of the subject, such a writer comes to the conclusion that the criticism in question has entirely failed to make good its case on a point like that of the authorship of St. Luke's Gospel, we are at least justified in concluding that critical objections do not possess the weight which unbelievers or sceptics are wont to assign to them. M. Renan, in a word, is no adequate witness to the Gospels; but he is a very significant witness as to the value of modern critical objections to them.

Let us pass to the two other so-called 'synoptical' Gospels. With respect to St. Matthew, M. Renan says in the same preface (*Vie de Jésus*, p. lxxxi):—

To sum up, I admit the four canonical Gospels as serious documents. All go back to the age which followed the death of Jesus; but their historical value is very diverse. St. Matthew evidently deserves peculiar confidence for the discourses. Here are 'the oracles,' the very notes taken while the memory of the instruction of Jesus was living and definite. A kind of flashing brightness at once sweet and terrible, a Divine force, if I may so say, underlies these words, detaches them from the context, and renders them easily recognisable by the critic.

In respect again to St. Mark, he says (p. lxxxii):—

The Gospel of St. Mark is the one of the three Synoptics which has remained the most ancient, the most original, and to which the least of later additions have been made. The details of fact possess in St. Mark a definiteness which we seek in vain in the other Evangelists. He is fond of reporting certain sayings of our Lord in Syro-Chaldaic. He is full of minute observations, proceeding, beyond doubt, from an eye-witness. There is nothing to conflict with the supposition that this eye-witness, who had evidently followed Jesus, who had loved Him and watched Him in close intimacy, and who had preserved a vivid image of him, was the Apostle Peter himself, as Papias has it.

I call these admissions a 'practical surrender' of the adverse case, as stated by critics like Strauss and Baur, who denied that we had in the Gospels contemporary evidence, and I do not think it necessary to define the adjective, in order to please Professor Huxley's appetite for definitions. At the very least it is a direct contradiction of Professor Huxley's statement (p. 175) that we know 'absolutely nothing' of 'the originator or originators' of the narratives in the first three Gospels; and it is an equally direct contradiction of the case, on which his

main reply to my paper is based, that we have no trustworthy evidence of what our Lord taught and believed.

But Professor Huxley seems to have been apprehensive that M. Renan would fail him, for he proceeds, in the passage I have quoted, to throw him over and to take refuge behind 'the main results of Biblical criticism, as they are set forth in the works of Strauss, Baur, Reuss, and Volkmar, for example.' It is scarcely comprehensible how a writer, who has acquaintance enough with this subject to venture on Professor Huxley's sweeping assertions, can have ventured to couple together those four names for such a purpose. 'Strauss, Baur, Reuss, and Volkmar!' Why, they are absolutely destructive of one another! Baur rejected Strauss's theory and set up one of his own; while Reuss and Volkmar in their turn have each dealt fatal blows at Baur's. As to Strauss, I need not spend more time on him than to quote the sentence in which Baur himself puts him out of court on this particular controversy. He says,⁴ 'The chief peculiarity of Strauss's work is, that it is a criticism of the Gospel history without a criticism of the Gospels.' Strauss, in fact, explained the miraculous stories in the Gospels by resolving them into myths, and it was of no importance to his theory how the documents originated. But Baur endeavoured, by a minute criticism of the Gospels themselves, to investigate the historical circumstances of their origin; and he maintained that they were *Tendenz-Schriften*, compiled in the second century, with polemical purposes. Volkmar, however, is in direct conflict with Baur on this point, and in the very work to which Professor Huxley refers,⁵ he enumerates (p. 18) among 'the written testimonies of the first century'—besides St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans, and the Apocalypse of St. John—'the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, according to John Mark of Jerusalem, written a few years after the destruction of Jerusalem, between the years 70 and 80 of our reckoning—about 75, probably; to be precise, about 73,' and he proceeds to give a detailed account of it, 'according to the oldest text, and particularly the Vatican text,' as indispensable to his account of Jesus of Nazareth. He treats it as written (p. 172) either by John Mark of Jerusalem himself, or by a younger friend of his. Baur, therefore, having upset Strauss, Volkmar proceeds to upset Baur; and what does Reuss do? I quote again from that splendid French edition of the Bible, on which Professor Huxley so much relies. On page 88 of Reuss's Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels, he sums up 'the results he believes to have been obtained by critical analysis,' under thirteen heads; and the following are some of them:—

2. Of the three synoptic Gospels one only, that which ecclesiastical tradition agrees in attributing to Luke, has reached us in its primitive form.

⁴ *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien*, 1847, p. 41.

⁵ *Jesus Nazarenus und die erste christliche Zeit*, 1882.

3. Luke could draw his knowledge of the Gospel history partly from oral information; he was able, in Palestine itself, to receive direct communications from immediate witnesses. . . . We may think especially here of the history of the passion and the resurrection, and perhaps also of some other passages of which he is the sole narrator.

4. A book, which an ancient and respectable testimony attributes to Mark, the disciple of Peter, was certainly used by St. Luke as the principal source of the portion of his Gospel between chap. iv. 31 and ix. 50, and between xviii. 15 and xxi. 38.

5. According to all probability, the book of Mark, consulted by Luke, comprised in its primitive form what we read in the present day from Mark i. 21 to xiii. 37.

It seems unnecessary, for the purpose of estimating the value of Professor Huxley's appeal to these critics, to quote any more. It appears from these statements of Reuss that if 'the results of Biblical criticism,' as represented by him, are to be trusted, we have the whole third Gospel in its primitive form, as it was written by St. Luke; and in this, as we have seen, Reuss is in entire agreement with Renan. But besides this, a previous book written by Mark, St. Peter's disciple, was certainly in existence before Luke's Gospel, and was used by Luke; and in all probability this book was, in its primitive form, the greater part of our present Gospel of St. Mark.

Such are those 'results of Biblical criticism' to which Professor Huxley has appealed; and we may fairly judge by these not only of the value of his special contention in reply to my paper, but of the worth of the sweeping assertions he, and writers like him, are given to making about modern critical science. Professor Huxley says that we know 'absolutely nothing' about the originators of the Gospel narratives, and he appeals to criticism in the persons of Volkmar and Reuss. Volkmar says that the second Gospel is really either by St. Mark or by one of his friends, and was written about the year 75. Reuss says that the third Gospel, as we now have it, was really by St. Luke. Now Professor Huxley is, of course, entitled to his own opinion: but he is not entitled to quote authorities in support of his opinion when they are in direct opposition to it. He asserts without the slightest fear of refutation that 'the four Gospels, as they have come to us, are the work of unknown writers.' His arguments in defence of such a position will be listened to with respect: but let it be borne in mind that the opposite arguments he has got to meet are not only those of orthodox critics like myself, but those of Renan, of Volkmar, and of Reuss—I may add of Pfleiderer, well known in this country by his Hibbert Lectures, who in his recent work on original Christianity attributes most positively the second Gospel in its present form to St. Mark, and declares that there is no ground whatever for that supposition of an *Ur-Marcus*—that is an original groundwork—from which Professor Huxley alleges that 'at the present time there is no visible escape.' If I were such an authority on morality as Professor Huxley, I might perhaps use

some unpleasant language respecting this vague assumption of criticism being all on his side, when it, in fact, directly contradicts him; and his case is not the only one to which such strictures might be applied. In *Robert Elsmere*, for example, there is some vapouring about the 'great critical operation of the present century' having destroyed the historical basis of the Gospel narrative. As a matter of fact, as we have seen, the great critical operation has resulted, according to the testimony of the critics whom Professor Huxley himself selects, in establishing the fact that we possess contemporary records of our Lord's life from persons who were either eyewitnesses, or who were in direct communication with eyewitnesses, on the very scene in which it was passed. Either Professor Huxley's own witnesses are not to be trusted, or Professor Huxley's allegations are rash and unfounded. Conclusions which are denied by Volkmar, denied by Renan, denied by Reuss, are not to be thrown at our heads with a superior air, as if they could not be reasonably doubted. The great result of the critical operation of this century has, in fact, been to prove that the contention with which it started in the persons of Strauss and Baur, that we have no contemporary records of Christ's life, is wholly untenable. It has not convinced any of the living critics to whom Professor Huxley appeals; and if he, or any similar writer, still maintains such an assertion, let it be understood that he stands alone against the leading critics of Europe in the present day.

Perhaps I need say no more for the present in reply to Professor Huxley. I have, I think, shown that he has evaded my point; he has evaded his own points; he has misquoted my words; he has misrepresented the results of the very criticism to which he appeals; and he rests his case on assumptions which his own authorities repudiate. The questions he touches are very grave ones, not to be adequately treated in a Review article. But I should have supposed it a point of scientific morality to treat them, if they are to be treated, with accuracy of reference and strictness of argument.

HENRY WACE.

II.

I SHOULD be wanting in the respect which I sincerely entertain for Professor Huxley if I were not to answer his 'appeal' to me in the last number of this Review for my opinion on a point in controversy between him and Dr. Wace. Professor Huxley asks me, 'in the name of all that is Hibernian, why a man should be expected to call himself a miscreant or an infidel?' I might reply to this after the alleged fashion of my countrymen by asking him another question, namely—when or where did I ever say that I expected him to call himself by either of these names? I cannot remember having said anything that even remotely implied this, and I do not therefore exactly see why he should appeal to my confused 'Hibernian' judgment to decide such a question.

As he has done so, however, I reply that I think it unreasonable to expect a man to call himself anything unless and until good and sufficient reason has been given him why he should do so. We are all of us bad judges as to what we are and as to what we should therefore be called. Other persons classify us according to what they know, or think they know, of our characters or opinions, sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly. And were I to find myself apparently incorrectly classified, as I very often do, I should be quite content with asking the person who had so classified me, first to define his terms, and next to show that these, as defined, were correctly applied to me. If he succeeded in doing this, I should accept his designation of me without hesitation, inasmuch as I should be sorry to call myself by a false name.

In this case, accordingly, if I might venture a suggestion to Professor Huxley, it would be that the term 'infidel' is capable of definition, and that when Dr. Wace has defined it, if the Professor accept his definition, it would remain for them to decide between them whether Professor Huxley's utterances do or do not bring him under the category of infidels, as so defined. Then, if it could be clearly proved that they do, from what I know of Professor Huxley's love of scientific accuracy and his courage and candour, I certainly should expect that he would call himself an infidel—and a miscreant too, in the original and etymological sense of that unfortunate term, and that he would even glory in those titles. If they should not be

so proved to be applicable, then I should hold it be as unreasonable to expect him to call himself by such names as he, I suppose, would hold it to be to expect us Christians to admit, without better reason than he has yet given us, that Christianity is 'the sorry stuff' which, with his 'profoundly' moral readiness to say 'unpleasant' things, he is pleased to say that it is.

There is another reference to myself, however, in the Professor's article as to which I feel that he has a better right to appeal to me—or, rather, against me, to the readers of this Review—and that is, as to my use, in my speech at the Manchester Congress, of the expression 'cowardly agnosticism.' I have not the report of my speech before me, and am writing, therefore, from memory; but my memory or the report must have played me sadly false if I am made to describe all agnostics as cowardly. A much slighter knowledge than I possess of Professor Huxley's writings would have certainly prevented my applying to all agnosticism or agnostics such an epithet.

What I intended to express and what I think I did express by this phrase was that there is an agnosticism which is cowardly. And this I am convinced that there is, and that there is a great deal of it too, just now. There is an agnosticism which is simply the cowardly escaping from the pain and difficulty of contemplating and trying to solve the terrible problems of life by the help of the convenient phrase, 'I don't know,' which very often means 'I don't care.' 'We don't know anything, don't you know, about these things. Professor Huxley, don't you know, says that we do not, and I agree with him. Let us split a B. and S.'

There is, I fear, a very large amount of this kind of agnosticism amongst the more youthful professors of that philosophy, and indeed amongst a large number of easy-going, comfortable men of the world, as they call themselves, who find agnosticism a pleasant shelter from the trouble of thought and the pain of effort and self-denial. And if I remember rightly it was of such agnostics I was speaking when I described them as 'chatterers in our clubs and drawing-rooms,' and as 'free-thinkers who had yet to learn to think.'

There is therefore in my opinion *a* cowardly agnosticism just as there is also *a* cowardly Christianity. A Christian who spends his whole life in the selfish aim of saving his own soul, and never troubles himself with trying to help to save other men either from destruction in the next world or from pain and suffering here, is a cowardly Christian. The eremites of the early days of Christianity, who fled away from their place in the world where God had put them, to spend solitary and, as they thought, safer lives in the wilderness, were typical examples of such cowardice. But in saying that there is such a thing as *a* cowardly Christianity, I do not thereby allege that there is no Christianity which is not cowardly. Similarly, when I speak of *a* cowardly agnosticism, I do not thereby allege that there

is no agnosticism which is not cowardly, or which may not be as fearless as Professor Huxley has always shown himself to be.

I hope that I have now satisfied the Professor on the two points on which he has appealed to me. There is much in the other parts of his article which tempts me to reply. But I have a dislike to thrusting myself into other men's disputes, more especially when a combatant like Dr. Wace, so much more competent than myself, is in the field. I leave the Professor in his hands, with the anticipation that he will succeed in showing him that a scientist dealing with questions of theology or Biblical criticism may go quite as far astray as theologians often do in dealing with questions of science.

My reply to Professor Huxley is accordingly confined to the strictly personal questions raised by his references to myself. I hope that, after making due allowance for Hibernicisms and for imperfect acquaintance with English modes of thought and expression, he will accept my explanation as sufficient.

W. C. PETERBOROUGH.

















